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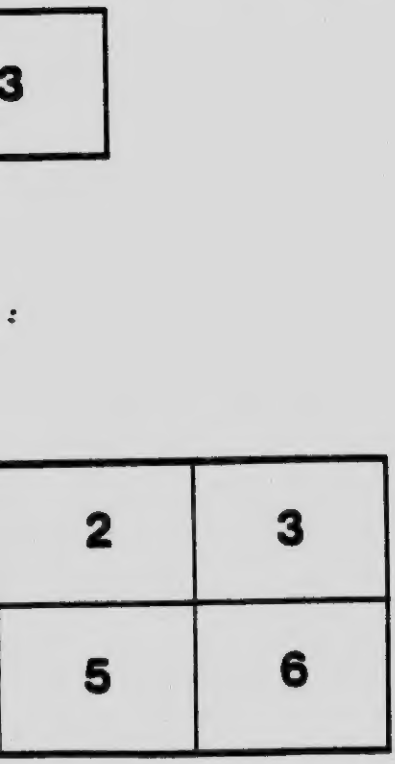

NOVA SCOTIA CHAP-BOOKS. *No. 14*

Twelve Profitable Sonnets

By Archibald MacMechan

Published for the Author by H. H. MARSHALL at his Shop over against the PROVINCE HOUSE in Halifax, N. S., 1920.

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A YOUNG BRIDE

To Margaret Bingay.

Slight,—with the grace of lilies in the dew,—
  Pale golden hair,—truth-telling lips,—and eyes
Of the May heaven's softest, kindliest blue,—
  Winsome,—and tender,—gravely sweet and wise;
A nature fine, compact of harmonies,
  Which, with the growing years in measure grew
  To a new depth, a richness ever new,
And from which fuller melodies shall rise.

Now those who love you and have longest known
  Your soft perfections in their sweetness all,
  Pray that God's blessing on your head may fall
In passing 'neath a roof-tree of your own,—
  That small fair head, so comely and so bright,—
  To be its centre, and its guiding light.

THE HAPPY MOTHER

To Mabel Wesson Murray.

A stooping lady, tall and finely made,
  In music skilled, in mother-learning wise,
  Moves thro' a mansion under English skies,
In strangely trailing, glittering robes arrayed.
She hath a secret which is soon betrayed;
  It may be read by all without disguise,
  In those grey, kindly, understanding eyes,
That ne'er for speech need call the lips to aid.

Across the seas, that Lady Dear to greet,
  A whilom Guest sends kindest thoughts today,
    Seeing a picture where the sunlight falls
Upon a path by lavender made sweet,
  Where happy children circle in their play
    The Happy Mother by the Abbey walls.

HALFWAY HOUSE

O little house of laughter and of tears,
  Whose walls have known wed lovers whispering
    low,
  Lips seeking lips beside the hearth-fire's glow,
Wailing of birth-pangs, nights of chilling fears,
And babbling children's clamor, which endears
  Even their bickering and short-lived woe,—
  And hush of death, the Triumph of the Foe,—
Blest be thy roof-tree thro' the coming years!

What is to come I know not. To divine
  Of doubtful joy, inevitable pain
Is never wisdom. But for what is mine
  Beyond recall, the usual loss and gain,
That on the steps of mortal man attend,
Blest be thy roof-tree till the very end!

ANY HUSBAND TO ANY WIFE

Often as I have failed you in the past,
  By word of love kept back defrauded you,
  By thought unshared, deprived you of your due,
Much more by overt fault, have seemed to cast
Doubt on the loyal bond that holds us fast.
  For all I ever did to make you rue,
  All ever left undone to prove me true,
Grant me the kiss of pardon at long last.

Let us join hands once more, as old Allies,
  To bide together the swift Years' assault,
    Knowing they must o'ercome us, soon or late;
There yet is time allotted to be wise,
  Repledge our faith, our love re-dedicate,
    Haply more strong for failure and for fault.

WITH A CARCANET

"—in her excellent white bosom, these—"

Christmas brings gifts, and here is mine to you—
  A linked trifle of the goldsmith's art,
  To lie on gaudy nights above your heart.
The richest treasure were your simple due,
And this poor toy is mean to outward view;
  Yet take it as a token on my part,
  Of old, old vows, which, oft repeated, start
The old, old love coursing in channels new.

Think of it, Dearest, as an amulet,
  With power to ward off harm from your white breast,
    And these strange pebbles gleaming with red fire,
As thoughts of mine, that constantly beset
  Your heart in tender siege, and will not rest
    Until they reach the goal of their desire.

ABSENT FRIENDS

To George Moreby Acklom.

Before the simple Christmas banquet ends,
  The happy faces round about the board,
  In their glad Babel, turn with one accord,
Where, on his feet the smiling host attends
The pause for silence; then, his head he bends,
  Raises on high the cup that he has pour'd,
  A loving cup, with memories crown'd and
    stor'd,
And gives the final pledge,—"To absent friends!"

God bless them all! Whether to east or west,
  Across the ranges, or beyond the sea,
    The dear old friends have vanish'd from our
      sight,
Wherever they have found a place of rest,
  It is not possible that they should be
    Beyond the reach of loving thoughts to-night.

Christmas, 1913.

"DREAR IS OUR YULE-TIDE"

To Mabel Cory.

Drear is our Yule-tide. With a double gloom
  Begins and ends the bleak December day;
  For darkly lowers the universal fray,
And Heaven high the storms of battle loom.
The cold of winter, with its icy brume
  Is doubly chill by the tyrannic sway
  Of shivering fears, that nothing can allay,
Freezing the blood with vapors from the tomb.

Still, as the Season of the Wondrous Birth
  Draws on once more, and each beloved name
    Stirs in the recollection, let us haste
To light o'er all this cold and darken'd earth
  The little Fire of Friendship 'mid the waste,
    And warm our hearts before the sacred flame.

Christmas, 1914.

"THE FLOOD-GATES BURST—"

To the memory of George Henderson Campbell.

The flood-gates burst, and forth the Deluge tore
  Of blood in seas, torrents of widows' tears,
  High-billowing Anguish, overwhelming Fears,
Outrage and Cruelty unknown before,
And such Black Shame as devils might deplore;
  And storms of lamentation smote all ears
  For ravage past the cure of coming years.
The Deluge drown'd the world. Men call it War.

One thing remains. Ever about this time
  The Christian legend tells of Love made Flesh,
    Of God Himself to this low world come down;
There being need to teach the world afresh,
    That many waters quench not Love sublime,
      Nor all the floods from broken flood-gates
        drown.

HOPE AND FEAR

To Dr. John Stewart.

Fear spake to Hope, "My Neighbor and my Foe,
  In every breast it is our lot to dwell,
  Waging, thro' doubtful years, a conflict fell;
Nor truce, nor treaty can we ever know.
But now I glory in thine overthrow.
  My brother Hate and I have cast our spell
  O'er all the Earth, and turn'd it into Hell.
Therefore be thou Despair! Thy very name forego!"

"My hour comes quickly," steadfast Hope replied,
  "Soon all the bells on Earth for joy shall ring,
  To greet the birth of Him, who came to bring
Me to the Earth, with Triumph at His side.
  Poor was the roof above His manger bed,
  But Wise Men follow'd where His birth-star led."

Christmas, 1916.

ELOQUENCE

To Kathleen Burke.

Erect, you faced the assembly, all in white,
  Yourself a clear and vibrant silver flame
Of eager human feeling, set alight
  By human suffering and by human shame,

And by the courage and the enduring will
  Of those brave women, who in distant lands,
Tend broken soldiers with God-gifted skill,
  And carry comfort in their healing hands.

You told your moving story with strange power,
  Swaying all hearts with winged words and warm,
While flashing countless glimpses in an hour,
  On the sad wreckage of the war's wild storm.

  You came and went, intent on highest ends;
  Strangers you met; and left behind you—friends.

LOSS AND GAIN

To James Metcalfe MacCallum.

The four Dire Years for ever marked blood red
  In Time's dark Calendar of Human Woe,
  Are now with Agonies of Long Ago.
And we are free to miss, and mourn Our Dead,
And faintly breathe relief from torturing Dread,
  To count our Losses, and at length to know
  Ourselves as henceforth poorer here below,
The Worst of Life draws on; the Best is fled.

Yet in despite of all the Spoiler Years,
  Old Friends, and true, and tested still remain
    Who know our faults and love us none the less.
And in this Christmas Peace that heals and cheers,
  We clearly see Their Love as Life's chief Gain,
    And bless Their Names, and call on GOD to bless.

Nativ. Dom. Nos. MCMXIX.

THE CANADIANS AT YPRES

(April 22-24, 1915).

To the memory of George William Stairs.

They did all men could do. The smoke of hell
Caught at their throats, but could not force them back.
The grey-coat foe charged hotly in the track
Swept by his iron hurricane of shell,
Resolved to win the sea-gate. None may tell
The force he pour'd, attack on mad attack,
On our brave few, as in the direst lack.
Of every aid, three days they fought,—and fell.

But they endured. They held their blood-soaked ground.
Between the sea-gate and the desperate foe,
Their thin, worn lines were adamantine bars.
Therefore their names with honor shall be crown'd
In their dear land's fair story, not with woe,
And in the record, they shall shine like stars.

NOTE.

All these sonnets have already appeared in *The University Magazine*, *The Standard*, *Toronto Saturday Night*, and elsewhere. With some I have now associated the names of certain friends—here or yonder—for reasons which each of them will understand.

A. M. M.

NOVA SCOTIA CHAP-BOOKS

* 1 *Three Sea Songs*

2 *The Nova-Scotianess of Nova Scotia*

3 *Changing Halifax*

4 *The Memorial Tower*

* 5 *The Orchards of Ultima Thule*

* 6 *The Log of a Halifax Privateer*

7 { *Glamming*
The Nereid's Embrace
The Two Games }

8 *The Loss of the Atalante*

9 *"Nova Scarcity"*

10 { *The Pleasance*
From Minas to the Wotan Line }

11 { *The Sky-Line*
Old King's }

12 { *Spring in Ultima Thule*
The Potato Patch }

13 *The Luck of the Grilse*

*14 *Twelve Profitable Sonnets*

15 *Twelve Unprofitable Sonnets*

16 *Afoot in Ultima Thule*

* Already published